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SIPDIS

S/ES-O FOR SECRETARY'S TRAVELING PARTY, NEA FOR FRONT  
OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL.

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/07/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GZ](#)

SUBJECT: SETTLERS STRONGLY SUPPORT IDF OPERATION IN GAZA

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Yesha Council Chairman told Poloff that four of the six IDF soldiers killed in Gaza since the beginning of military operations on December 27 were settlers from the West Bank/East Jerusalem. Settler contacts told Poloff that they strongly support IDF operations in Gaza, but blame Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005 for allowing Hamas to gain a stronghold in Gaza and launch attacks on Israeli cities. Some extreme settlers are calling for the GOI to take advantage of the ground invasion to re-establish settlements in Gaza for strategic purposes. Most settlers do not support this initiative. End summary.

SETTLERS MOURN DEATHS OF IDF SOLDIERS;  
STAUNCHLY SUPPORT THE OPERATION IN GAZA  
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¶2. (C) Of the six IDF soldiers killed in Gaza through January 7, four were from settlements: Staff Sergeant Dvir Emanuelof from Givat Ze'ev, Major Dagan Vertman from Maale Mikhmas, Captain Yonatan Netanel from Kedumim, and Sergeant Nitai Stern, from Pisgat Ze'ev in East Jerusalem. Yesha Council Chairman Dani Dayan told Poloff January 6 that it is "no coincidence" that so many of the dead soldiers were settlers, given the high number of settlers serving in the IDF.

¶3. (C) Amcit Givat Ze'ev settler Rabbi Ari Kahn said Givat Ze'ev is mourning the family's loss and staunchly supports the IDF operation in Gaza, adding that "people think the operation is long overdue, given the suffering of so many Israelis threatened by Hamas' mortars." Former Ofra spokeswoman Ruchie Avital told Poloff January 5 that, with many children of Ofra settlers in the IDF, there is universal support in Ofra for military operations in Gaza.

SETTLERS OPPOSE PA CONTROL OVER GAZA  
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¶4. (C) Elyakim Haetzni, co-founder of the Kiryat Arba settlement, told Poloff January 6 that disengagement from Gaza in 2005 paved the way for Hamas to consolidate its power and launch mortars at Israeli cities. Haetzni and other settler contacts expressed concern that the GOI will hand over Gaza to the PA at the conclusion of the operation. Haetzni and Dayan said the PA is "also a terrorist organization" that will continue Hamas' attempt to "destroy Israel." They said they will oppose PA control over Gaza, believing that a unified PA would be better positioned for permanent status negotiations, threatening West Bank settlements.

EXTREME IDEOLOGICAL SETTLERS:  
ISRAEL MUST "RETURN TO GUSH KATIF"  
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15. (C) Haetzni told Poloff that Israel has "no choice" but to re-establish settlements in Gaza, as strategic positions for the IDF to maintain security in Gaza. Haetzni said the IDF "is at home" in the West Bank because so many settlers are in its ranks, and he attributed the relative calm in the West Bank to the IDF presence there. Haetzni said many settlers believe that "land for peace" is not a viable formula, arguing that Gaza disenagement meant "land for rockets." He said the world has a "psychological block" against "the idea of occupation in Gaza," but Israel is "being forced to see that there is no other choice."

16. (C) Dayan said re-establishing settlements in Gaza is popular among settlers, but is "wishful thinking," with most realizing that it is "not feasible in the near future." Rabbi Ari Kahn said moderate settlers "realize that is not a mature position," because settlements in Gaza are not defensible.

#### HEIGHTENED SECURITY CONCERNS AMONG SETTLERS

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17. (C) The Yesha Council website cautions settlers against hitchhiking in the West Bank, warning of kidnappings by Palestinians posing as helpful Israelis. Avital told Poloff January 5 that settlers and Israeli police are on "high alert" in the West Bank in fear of Palestinian protests and attacks on cars, and that many settlers are taking longer routes to avoid "unsafe areas."

WALLES